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ABSTRACT

The author states that the black revolution went awry because black intellectuals failed to develop what has often been called a black political psychology, that is, the realization of a link between identity and polity, between black self-perspective and political actions; and that the individualistic emphasis of American life is causing upwardly mobile blacks to lose contact with the mass of black Americans. It is proposed that this confusion and alienation can be resolved by the utilization of theatre that incorporates and reflects the experience of working blacks and unites all blacks in a common understanding of their heritage and goals. Brown University's black theatre is described as an example of how this can be accomplished. References are included. (WP)

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Finding the People's Ideology
Black Theatre at Brown University

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Rhett S. Jones received his B.A. from the University of Illinois "with Honors and Distinction in Sociology," earned a M.A. in Sociology, and an A.M. in History, before taking his Ph.D. in History. He received his doctorate from Brown University where he is now Associate Professor of History and Afro-American Studies and has directed the black studies program since 1972. He is the author of more than forty articles. A grant from the American Council of Learned societies will enable him to complete his book on black societies in the New World.

Finding the People's Ideology:
Black Theatre at Brown University

Among Afro-Americans a recurrent topic of conversation is the failure of the "black revolution of the sixties." A movement which had its genesis in the refusal of one courageous black woman to move to the back of a bus, a movement which confronted segregation head-on, a movement which put the torch to American cities, a movement which transformed black college students into militant revolutionaries, a movement which legitimated black studies in the university, a movement which propelled many blacks into middle-class positions, a movement which culminated in the passage of laws which have transformed the nation seems to have come to naught. In the seventies black folk seem confused, divided, and out of touch with one another.

This essay first briefly sets forth reasons for the current confusion characteristic of the movement. Second, it illustrates the way in which black theatre has been used at Brown University to resolve this confusion and to bring those interested in the struggle together.

From the perspective of the seventies it is clear the so-called black revolution went awry primarily because black intellectuals failued to develop what has elsewhere been called a Black Political Psychology."[1] At the heart of political psychology lies the assumption that there is a link between identity and polity, between black persons' conceptions of themselves and their political actions. But while some of those who were in the vanguard of the African revolutionary struggle---notably Fanon and Cabral---clearly understood the link between black self-conception and black politics, Afro-Americans who wrote in the sixties failed to address themselves to the relationship between self-image and political action. Carmichael and Hamilton seem to have well understood the political side of the linkage, but devoted little time to African American self-definition.[2] Similarly, Harold Cruse obviously had a firm grasp

on the nature of Afro-American politics, but little understood black psychology.[3] In contrast, Eldridge Cleveroffered some provocative, if fragmented, insights into the black psyche, but had a romantic conception of black politics.[4]

These writers can hardly be blamed for failing to systematically work out a framework for Black Political Psychology since the three academic disciplines on which such a discipline must rest are woefully underdeveloped in the United States. A black Political Psychology must first, and foremost, rest on an understanding of black intellectual history and must recognize the existence of a tradition of black thought. This tradition is characterized by a reflectivity that is in its turn a product of the double-consciousness DuBois so well described.[5] Although black social history has recently won acceptance in the universities many historians remain unpersuaded of the existence of a black intellectual history worthy of the name, and it is still easier to persuade mainstream publishers and journal editors to print works devoted to Afro-American social history than to convince them to publish black intellectual history. Moreover, the discipline of psychology is underdeveloped with regard to works on black self-conception, having preferred to concentrate on the debilitating consequences of racism.[6] Finally, the discipline of political science has yet to devote much discussion to Afro-American polity in general and Afro-American political theories in particular.[7] The reason for the failure of these three disciplines to address themselves to important aspects of the African American experience is that to do so would force them to face up to the existence of the black mind and to the presence of reflective, analytic thought among black folk. The failure of black writers to perceive the important link between identity and polity and to work out---at the theoretical level---the relationship between the two in such a way as to make for enduring political action is to be partly found in the fact that the three disciplines which inform their thought have themselves

failed to come to grips with black reflectivity.

Two alternatives to main-stream thought, Pan-Africanism (and its variants Negritude and Black Nationalism), and Marxism---with some exceptions---provide black scholars with little help in working out the relationship between identity and polity. The underdevelopment of Marxist Psychology is too well known to require lengthly discussion here.[8] The failure of Marxists to come to grips with psyche is partly response for the failure of the ideology to gain large numbers of black supporters in the United States. Marxists, by and large, have no idea how blacks see themselves and simple minded paradigms which impute certain self-definitions are no substitute for hard study. Pan-Africanism is often absurdly romantic, harkening back to a mythical, Eden-like African past, and celebrating, certain supposed characteristics as the unique possession of persons of African descent. It is simply not relevant for the mass of Afro-Americans. These same black folk have also noted the failure of Pan-Africanism to have any serious continuing impact on the politics and policies of the independent African states.[9]

Lacking a developed Black Political Psychology the movement is confused and hence unable to cope with the successes of the sixties which---at the least---have made it possible for larger numbers of blacks than ever before to achieve positions of prestige and influence. In the absence of a developed ideology, many of these blacks have been caught up in the individualistic ethic so strong in the United States, a fact which poses grave problems for African Americans since for the first time comparatively large numbers of blacks are leaving the black community, moving up and out, and leaving behind the masses of folk. In order to bridge this growing gulf, and to enable black scholars to write of the things which interest and can help black people, it is necessary to better understand how the masses of black people see themselves and the political options before them. To do so it is necessary not to return to the sixties, but to profit from what took place in the decade and to involve black women and men in the work.

But in order to do this, it is first necessary to understand their thought, to see how they see themselves, politics, and their history, to find the people's ideology.

An Evolving Methodology: Research and Dialogue

In the United States most universities lack structures for involving members of the community in their work, and many of the latter---often for very good reasons---are not much interested in what takes place on the campus. They stay away in droves from such staples of university fare as lectures, panel discussions, and symposia. At Brown University, faculty in the Afro-American Studies Program have since 1973 been at work on a strategy for involving the community. The strategy is organized about two dialogues. The first dialogue is aimed at setting the in-house relations of the Program in order, and in getting the Program's faculty to talking with one another on a regular basis. It involves discussion between faculty trained in the humanities and the social sciences on the one hand, and those trained in the performing arts on the other. This first dialogue is aimed at transforming research undertaken by the Program's faculty or Brown students into a performance arts piece. Most of these pieces have been in the theatre, and the resulting plays are not mere popularizations, but the result of a genuine collaboration between researcher and playwright, a collaboration which must be fully satisfactory to both, and which, while allowing the playwright to pursue his vision, is faithful to the data collected by the scholar. In order to be successful, the dialogue must be truly multi-disciplinary in the sense that the playwright and the researcher must each insist on meeting the highest standards in his respective discipline.

Once the first dialogue is completed and the researcher and the playwright satisfied with the piece, it is performed not only for the typical university audience, but for the community. As a number of Brown projects have demonstrated,

community residents will turn out for an evening of music, drama, dance, and song, particularly if the performances are exciting as well as informative. The second dialogue takes place during or after each performance and provides the community with an opportunity to speak back to the playwright and to the scholar whose work stands behind the play. Rites and Reason (the performing arts component of the Afro-American Studies Program) and Sound Awareness (its music organization) are vehicles which convey information to the public and the means by which citizens are afforded an opportunity, through dialogue, to speak back to faculty and students in the University, to inform their research, and to shape its future direction.

Stated in this simple way, the encounter between those from the University and those of the community would seem likely to produce confrontations---with each group stubbornly committed to its own conception of identity and polity---but while there have been confrontations aplenty they have not always been between the community and the university. It has long been the policy of Sound Awareness and Rites and Reason not just to perform for people, but to involve the people in performance. Community members have designed sets, written plays, written music, acted, done public relations work, played music, served as stage hands, worked as prop persons, acted as technical directors, and conducted research. So involved are members of the community in productions that it is an oversimplification to say that dialogue between the University and the community begins only after each performance; it would be more accurate to say it takes place throughout the entire process.

Students also play an important role in the two process as many of them are involved in research in their classes. Still others, who have an interest in the performing arts, are involved in production work as an extra-curricular activity. While students contribute much to the two dialogues around which the Arfo-American Studies Program is organized, they also gain the opportunity to

work together as members of a research team. Undergraduates in American colleges and universities are ordinarily well-schooled in the techniques of individual research but are seldom given the opportunity to work together. Yet much work on the frontiers of knowledge is undertaken by multi-disciplinary teams of scholars who cancel out one another's disciplinary blind spots. At Brown, students in black studies do not have to wait until they are mature graduate students to work with persons trained in different disciplines, but have the opportunity to work with them early in their undergraduate careers. Student involvement in the Program's work is made possible by the University's "New Curriculum" which places much of the responsibility for a student's education in his own hands, and which has eliminated formal distribution requirements. Brown's open curriculum enables undergraduates, in careful consultation with faculty, to design courses for individual study and courses in which they will work with other students. The black studies program's emphasis on co-operative research, team-teaching, community participation, and multi-disciplinary learning could not have come about in an environment that did not permit students some say in their own work.

Indeed, students played an important role in the first project to employ the two dialogues, "Oral History as an Index to Change." The project directors, Professors George Houston Bass and Rhett S. Jones, sought to learn something of the nature of race relations in Providence, Rhode Island in the years between 1920 and 1940, to transform these findings into a play, and to subject this play to informed criticism by citizens. They began work in 1973, and in 1974 together with fifteen Brown undergraduates---nine black and six white---created a Group Independent Study Project to achieve these goals. Jones assigned the students studies of black communities, undertaken for the most part by anthropologists and sociologists in the period 1920 to 1940, in order that they might

develop some insight into black life during the era.[10] He also provided the students with some rudimentary training in interview techniques, worked with them in the development of an interview schedule, reviewed census data with them, and supervised their examination of the Providence Advance, and the Providence Chronicle - the two local black newspapers published during the period. With this preliminary work behind them the students began to conduct interviews during the spring semester of 1974. More than eighty interviews were tape-recorded with senior citizens, both white and black, who had lived in Providence during the period, and what the undergraduates lacked in formal training they more than made up for in enthusiasm and a genuine interest in the respondents. The course met once a week to listen to the tapes, to enable students to discuss what they had learned in the interviews, and as a consequence of what they had learned, to make certain modifications in the interview schedule. A picture of race relations in the period gradually emerged.[11]

Three-quarters of the way through the term, Jones prepared a working paper which summarized what had been learned to that point. Each of the students critiqued the working paper in writing. Jones then prepared a second working paper which attempted to incorporate the observations and ideas expressed in the student critiques. Finally, at the end of the semester, each of the undergraduates wrote an assessment of Jones' second effort. Bass attended each meeting of the class, helped to construct the interview schedule, read in the community studies, reviewed all tapes, participated in all discussions, read all student papers, read Jones' two working papers, and at the end of the semester was ready to begin work on his play. Over the course of the summer of 1974 he worked on The Providence Garden Blues consulting regularly with Jones and carefully linking characters and scenes to the data collected by students. The play, performed early in 1975---nearly two years after the two professors had

first conceived the idea of transforming research into a performance piece---was followed by open discussion sessions in which members of the community engaged in often fierce discussion concerning the play, its assumptions, the accuracy of the research, the meaning of the play for blacks, and the motives of the students, Bass, and Jones. The Providence Garden Blues was performed six times and drew more than 1200 persons. Faculty in Afro-American Studies at Brown learned as much from the encounters after the plays as they had learned from the research and the play itself. Bass and Jones were encouraged to continue their work.

In so doing they brought Soap Opera to Brown. Shortly before The Providence Garden Blues was performed, Bass and Jones began to discuss with community residents and Brown undergraduates, the black experience in the Americas. These discussions culminated in a new course titled "Images and Myths of African American People in New World Consciousness," which concerned itself with the evolution of racist thought in the Americas. Taught in the spring semester of 1975, the course met once a week with sessions alternating between a general meeting for all students one week, and small seminar groups organized about student interests the next. After selecting a subject area each student met with no more than five other students and a discussion leader over the course of the term. Discussion leaders were Brown faculty, faculty from Rhode Island College, and advanced graduate students in the University. The general sessions included a lecture by Bass or Jones, followed by an episode of the soap---titled Two Wings---followed in its turn by discussion. The soap itself was written, produced, directed, and performed by student and community members of Rites and Reason. Drawing on outlines of lectures prepared by Bass and Jones, discussions with faculty and readings, they began to develop the six-part soap on the trials,

tantrums, theories, and tribulations of the Robinsons, a mythical black family living in Georgia. The episodes, written by Brown undergraduates, skillfully blended the usual soap opera cliches with the problems of a black family.[13] The students and community residents involved in the production of Two Wings embodied themes from the lectures in their scripts.

The division of students into those who prepared the productions of the soap, and those who registered for the course was not as neat as this description might suggest. Some of those involved in the production of the Soap, also took the course. During the mid-semester examination, scattered about the room, diligently writing in their bluebooks, were a number of students still in make-up and costume.

While Two Wings was primarily intended for student consumption, the fact that many members of Rites and Reason were from the community caused news of the performances of the Soap to spread beyond the campus. As a result a class of thirty-odd students was ordinarily inundated by ninety-odd---mostly black---community residents who first came to follow the saga of the Robinsons, and staved often to angrily dispute the assumptions made by the playwrights and expressed in the lectures. As the semester continued, this community audience grew larger,and its observations more helpful in informing the seminar sessions as well as the ideas of Bass and Jones. Two Wings convinced faculty in Brown's Afro-American Studies Program that work in the social sciences and the humanities could be transformed into drama, that Rhode Island residents were interested in the results of the transformation, and that they could, and would, offer a check to academic nonsense.

Encouraged by these events Bass and Jones planned a project which came a cropper. After talking with students and community persons working in Rites and Reason they concluded they ought to seek a wider audience than a play or a series of plays could possibly reach. They attempted a film. In the summer

of 1975 they selected from DuBois' The Souls of Black Folk an oft cited quote which seemed worthy of cinematization:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others,of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,---an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[14]

The issue of double-consciousness had been the subject of discussion in a number of academic disciplines, thought different terminologies had been employed. In literature, it had frequently been the subject of emotionally charged novels such as those concerned with the tragic mulatto. In history, double-consciousness was often found among those caught up in the expanding frontier of Euro-America. In sociology, it was studied under the headings of pluralism and marginality, while in anthropology scholars focused on acculturation and assimilation, and in political science academics interested in colonalism and pluralistic societies had something to contribute. In psychology, the concern was with identity, socialization, and re-socialization, while in phibsophy an interest in double consciousness at times surfaced in studies of self awareness.

Jones was assigned the responsibility of developing a list of readings from these various disciplines for a new course offered in the fall term of 1975 titled "Double-Consciousness in the Afro-American Perspective." Students who enrolled in the course chose from a smorgasbord of readings four or five articles (or chapters of a book) per week. While the articles and the book selections were grouped under a common heading, no two students read the same assignment. Students shared the results of their readings in class discussions. After six weeks of leading such discussions Jones turned the course over to Bass who had first to get the students to agree on the meaning of double-consciousness, second, give them some idea of the techniques of preparing a film script, third to persuade the disciplinary centered camps that had appeared in the course

to trust one another, and fourth, to prepare the script itself. Bass' strategy for drawing these many threads together was to encourage seminar members to think first about characters who would manifest the advantages and disadvantages of double-consciousness. Fierce discussion ranged about the question of whether the film's protagonist was to be male or female; those who favored the latter carried the day and Carma Greene was born. Under Bass' skillful direction, the students hammered out an identity for Ms. Greene and created family, friends, job and a romantic interest. Jones participated in these discussions and helped the students to make certain the fine tuning of Carma's character was in accord with their readings and conclusions reached in discussion. Once the students were agreed upon Carma's character and the dual perspective she brought to her life, they were ready---with Bass' help---to populate her environment, and block out scenes for the film. After bringing students to this level of agreement Bass wrote a film treatment, which was then turned over to the students for written criticism.

Bass and Jones looked forward to showing The Taming of Carma Greene, but failed to obtain sufficient funding to produce the work.[15] While the first of the two dialogues---the exchange between persons trained in scholarship and those trained in the performing arts---had once again proven itself, the second---between those who had developed the piece and the community---had not been realized.

Refining Two Dialogues: Strategies and Techniques

In the next project, "Providence Festival I," Bass and Ricardo Wiley, then Artistic Director of Performing Arts Theatre of Rhode Island, decided in the spring of 1976, on a more elaborate strategy for involving the community in their plans for festival rooted in the arts. As the project unfolded it became increasingly clear to Bass that if it were not informed by the disciplined insights of the social sciences and the humanities the effort community residents were putting into it would be wasted on yet another shallow artistic happening.

Jones agreed to serve as Chief Research Consultant and faculty at Brown and other Rhode Island colleges were asked to work on the project. With the full support of Brown's black studies program, the directors also established a board of directors for the festival composed of members of the greater Providence community. "Providence Festival I" involved months of planning and before it was completed reached hundreds of Rhode Islanders of all races and walks of life. Church choirs, service clubs, educational institutions, state agencies, social organizations, city bureaus, businesses, community groups, and philanthropic agencies all contributed time, personnel, and funds.

The project directors planned a week-long festival to be organized about a myth deliberately created by Bass for the purpose of exploring the black New World experience. While Bass was the primary artistic force behind the myth the tale itself was the result of a collaborative effort. Bass and Wiley outlined a draft of the myth which was presented to elementary and junior high school students, who were then asked to comment on the myth and to suggest revisions. Bass took their suggestions into consideration in drafting a second version which was shared with area playwrights and Brown's Afro-American Studies faculty. Their reactions were used to shape another draft which was shared with actors and told to high school students and adults in a career training program. Each of these three groups was also asked to offer suggestions. Bass then systematically reviewed this information and drafted a final version. His intent had been to shape the story to fit the people's ideas and in so doing he taped a rich vein of oral tradition in black Rhode Island. Jones and other scholars helped Bass to understand the complex relationship he had uncovered between myth making and the community organization. Bass met and talked with scholars trained in literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and the theatre and not content with picking their brains persuaded each to write a short piece for the booklet published in conjunction with the festival.[16]

The week-long festival ran from July 24 to July 31 1976, and included a parade, games, touchable exhibits, food, water painting for children, a New Orleans style funeral march, community prayer, dance, a "Family Strut" (people did), and two performances each of the first three parts of the myth. On July 31 the final part of the community constructed myth was presented. The myth itself was presented in larger than life colors and involved community choirs and dance groups in an evening of song, drama, and dance. More than 6,000 Rhode Islanders---a figure which includes numerous repeaters---for the most part black, attended and participated in "Providence Festival I."

But while the crowds clearly manifested support for this collaboration of scholarship, the performing arts, and the community, Rhode Island residents complained that it lacked the focused, structured framework of The Providence Garden Blues, and Two Wings. In these projects community members understood the role they were to play in an evening's work; they enjoyed performances, but viewed them critically, and were prepared with questions. Plans to have persons with portable tape recorders circulating among the crowds at the festival to obtain community feedback unhappily miscarried and in the absence of recorded interviews, the project directors had no systematic way of determining the community's reaction to various events. Many Rhode Islanders were pleased with the opportunity to participate in the event, but frustrated because they were not afforded the chance to put forth specific suggestions. Significantly, many questioned the relationship between scholarship and the mythnic ritual constructed by Bass. Surprisingly familiar with the two dialogues developed by Brown's black studies program, community residents were not clear just what data was being presented in the ritual, nor did they understand how it had been collected and utilized in the shaping of the final product. Clearly, members of the community were measuring the Program against the standards it had set

for itself. In response to these questions faculty in Afro-American Studies outlined the process followed by Bass and called attention to the written statements of academics published in the festival booklet, but they gradually came to understand that they were being criticized not only for their failure to spell out the relationship between the myth and data collection, but for their failure to provide the community with a forum in which its members would have an opportunity to exchange ideas with those who had organized the festival.

Bass and Jones conceded they had not always clearly spelled out the exact nature of their collaborative effort and thought the interaction between scholarship and performance might be better understood if outsiders were brought in to follow the two dialogues they had developed. For reasons more fully described elsewhere they therefore decided to involve scholars and playwrights outside the Afro-American Studies Program in a project which sought to discern the conceptualization of black folk in four disciplines since the historic Supreme Court decision of 1954. "Image and Reality" presented in the Spring of 1977 sought to ascertain the degree to which mainstream academics had accepted a distorted view of black life. Four distinguished black scholars, Houston Baker in literature, Kenneth Clark in psychology, Vincent Harding in history, and Joyce Ladner in sociology agreed to prepare monographs on the image of black folk in their respective disciplines since 1954, and to travel to Providence to deliver an abbreviated version of their work. Three playwrights agreed to use the monographs written by the researchers as the basis for one-act plays.[17] Patricia Gibson read the works of Clark and Ladner and wrote from them Konvergence and Void Passage, respectively; Cleveland Kurtz read Baker's lengthy work and based John Willy McGee on it; Bass himself wrote The Articulate Sound of an Articulate Tale based on an outline provided by Harding, and in Mal-o-Coff Blue drew together the ideas of four scholars and three playwrights.

Between April 19 and April 30 each of the scholars travelled to the Brown campus to present his/her paper. This presentation was followed, after a short intermission, by the play based on the monograph. A discussion followed the play during which the playwright and the scholar talked with the audience about the work itself, their collaboration, problems they had encountered in their work, and the image and reality of black life. The discussions were lively and often heated; community residents were not at all intimidated by the distinguished scholars. These encounters between playwrights and scholars on the one hand, and members of the community on the other were tape-recorded and have helped to shape the work of faculty in Afro-American Studies.

Of the more than 1200 persons who attened "Image and Reality," many indicated that the performances of professional actors helped them to better understand what the Afro-American Studies Program was about. Faculty in the Program therefore authorized Bass and Jones to seek funding for professional actors for the next project.

"Free to Die" not only brought professional actors back to the Brown campus, but was the first project to be conducted jointly with a black community group. The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society founded by Mrs. Rowena Stewart, had in less than three years, vastly expanded knowledge of Rhode Island Black History and in 1977 won American Association of State and Local History merit award for interpretation of Black History in Rhode Island. As part of its on-going program the Black Heritage Society annually commemorated the Battle of Newport, a 1778 engagement in which the First Rhode Island Regiment, an all black unit, turned back wave after wave of attacks by British-led Hessian troops. Having occupied Newport during the course of the Revolutionary War, the British had confidently advanced to the north with the aim of capturing Providence and opening up much of New England. They were defeated by black men who, after

much controversy had been freed by the Rhode Island legislature, armed and called upon to defend the colonies united in rebellion.[18] The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society believed the state itself had failed to sufficiently acknowledge the importance of the Regiment. Faculty in Brown's Afro-American Studies Program were fascinated by the drama inherent in a group of men who by act of the Rhode Island government were "Free to Die" for the independence of the colonies, but denied the full privileges of free men. Not only were some members of the Black Regiment never paid for their service, but an attempt was made to return some men to slavery after the war and many white Rhode Islanders denied their courage in battle.

The Brown black studies faculty believed that Rhode Islanders in general and black Rhode Islanders, in particular should learn more of Black Regiment, and that knowledge of the plight of the men of the First Rhode Island would prove useful in understanding the present problems of black folk: In addrssing the community, the Afro-American Studies Program stated:

> In addition to conveying information, "Free to Die" seeks to stimulate reflection and informed discussion among Rhode Islanders ...At times the Regiment has been celebrated and seen as playing a crucial role in the course of the Revolutionary War, at other times it has been denigrated and its contribution to the rebel effort discounted. The conceptualization of black soldiers in all America's wars has been similar. The high rate of black casualties in the Viet Nam conflict is seen by some as proof of their bravery and courage and by others as an indication of their cowardice and inefficiency. Afro-Americans have always been figures of controversy in our nation and in this sense the argument among the white colonists of Rhode Island over the arming of blacks prefigured arguments over the position of non-whites in the independent United States.[19]

Dr. Gary Puckrein, who had earned his Ph.D. at Brown, and served as Teaching Associate in Afro-American Studies, agreed to undertake research on the Black Regiment in the collections of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society and in other institutions. His rough notes, and subsequent drafts were reviewed in meetings with Stewart, Bass, Jones and Patricia Gibson a playwright who

had agreed to write a work based on the research.

Puckrein's research culminated in a monograph, The Rhode Island Black Regiment in the American Revolution. Gibson's play, performed in late November and early December 1978, with a professional cast, was titled My Mark, My Name. More than eighteen hundred Rhode Islanders, many of them black, attended performances. During intermissions, "roving reporters" armed with tape recorders mingled with the crowds with prepared questions to elicit comments on the work, the research, and its meaning. As this is being written, those comments are being reviewed, analyzed, and interpreted. Community residents came to performances prepared not just to be entertained but to offer their opinions, for the record, on the meaning of "Free to Die" for black programs and strategies.

Finding the People's Ideology

This overview of the work of Brown's black studies program since 1973 is an over-simplification which does not fully recount the many snafus, errors, foul-ups, and mistakes of judgement. And the account may seem to suggest a rational, evolving plan in which the program and its theatre component, Rites and Reason moved in a logical sequential manner from one project to another. Nothing could be further from the truth. Blunders abounded! Yet the Afro-American studies faculty remains convinced that there is a People's Ideology, and that the thought patterns of working class Americans ought not simply be dismissed as ignorance, as superstition, as religiosity, or as a lack of class consciousness. The people do not turn out for lectures by distinguished schclars and if a few of them do they mostly sit, tongued tied in silence and awed by "learning." The people do turn out for our plays, they understand the works have origins in research, they participate in discussion, they critique the performances, they answer our questions, and they shape our work. Theatre is not irrelevant to the lives of working class blacks unless it chooses to be.

At Brown, we have chosen to perform not the tired classics, nor even the fashionable black popular plays, but rather to do original works, informed by scholarship. The people---black and white---have responded magnificently and have often overmatched and overwhelmed our performances with their ideas. In so doing they have not only helped to put blacks back in touch with one another, but have established a forum in which all members of the community can talk with one another.

[1] See Rhett S. Jones, "History, Social Structure, and Psyche: Toward a Black Social Psychology," PASS, 2 (Spring-Summer 1978), pp. 18-25. See also his "Understanding Afro-American Thought: Can the Black Writer Help?" Studies in Black Literature 7 (Spring 1976), especially, pp. 10-11.

[2] Stokley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967),

[3] Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: Morrow, 1967).

[4] Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice, (New York: Delta Books, 1968).

[5] W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Fawcett, 1961; first published, 1903), pp. 16-17.

[6] Two now classic studies of the negative consequences of racism for the black personality are John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937) and Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, The Mark of Oppression (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964--first published, 1951). Two recent treatments of black self definition are Marvin D. Wyne, Kinnard P. White and Richard H. Coop, The Black Self (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974) and James A. Banks and Jean D. Brambs (eds.), Black Self-Concept (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

[7] Two studies of black politics offer only passing consideration of the link between identity and polity. See Hanes Walton, Jr., Black Politics (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), pp. 11-15; also Lucius J. Barker and Jesse J. McCorry, Jr., Black Americans and the Political System (Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop, 1976), pp. 57-67.

[8] Some problems and prospects of Marxist Psychology are considered in Phil Brown, Toward a Marxist Psychology (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); see also Bertell Ollman, "Social Revolution and Sexual Revolution," Monthly Review 25 (September, 1973),

pp. 37-52. For a New Left-perspective---unhappily marred by much jargon---see Claude Steiner, et.al. (eds.), Readings in Radical Psychiatry (New York: Grove Press, 1975), especially chapters 9, 15, and appendix.

9 I am grateful to Anani Dzidzienyo for this insight.

10 An important by-product of this work is Bibliography on Negroes, 1920-1940, compiled from the International Index by Antoinette Livramento, graduate student assistant for the project. A number of copies of the Bibliography have been photocopied and may be borrowed from the Afro-American Studies Program.

11 A full list of those involved in the project is found in the small booklet---or large playbook, the pioneering nature of the publication makes its classification uncertain---distributed at performances of the Providence Garden Blues.

12 Brown faculty who led seminars were Philip Leis (Department of Anthropology), William McLoughlin (History), Ferdnand Jones (Psychology), Harold Pfautz (Sociology), Ernest Attah (Sociology), Newell Stultz (Political Science), and Charles Nichols (English). Two professors from Rhode Island College, William Robinson (English) and Ronald Montgomery (Sociology) also participated, as did Gary Puckrein, then a graduate student in History at Brown. Felix Maimo, then a Brown University graduate student in French, served as Teaching Assistant for the project.

13 Denise Bledsoe, Phillis Hall, Delores McKnight, and Elmo Morgan wrote the six scripts for Two Wings. Commercials, some with Rabelaisan overtones, were included in the soaps. Parts II and V of the Soap Opera appear, along with a synopsis of the other four segments in the Shubert Playbook Series, (Vol. 3., No. 2, 1975).

14 DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk, pp. 16-17.

15 While the Afro-American Studies Program, and its arts component, Rites and Reason,

failed to obtain monies for this project more than $400,000 has been raised in funds outside the University to support development of the "two dialogues." Especially supportive have been the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities, and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. Bass and Jones have recently received a grant from the Ford Foundation to enable them to study similar efforts being undertaken about the country.

16 Providence Festival I (Providence: Afro-American Studies Program, 1976). Contributing scholars were Phil Petrie, a New York City based critic, Rhode Island College Professor of English, William Robinson, and Brown faculty members William Beeman (Anthropology), Donald Wilmeth (English/Theatre Arts), Ferdnand Jones (Psychology), and Rhett S. Jones (History/Afro-American Studies).

17 The monographs themselves will soon be published.

18 Gary Alexander Puckrein, The Rhode Island Black Regiment in the American Revolution (Providence: Afro-American Studies Program and Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, forthcoming).

19 Playbook, My Mark, My Name.